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RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY PRIORITY 1079
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 1272
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND PRIORITY 0292
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY PRIORITY 0698
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000015

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SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 1/5: PRESIDENT NAMES BAINIMARAMA
INTERIM PM; MORE ABUSE CLAIMS; FIJI VILLAGE UNCERTAINTIES;
CHINA/TAIWAN AND FIJI

REF: SUVA 005 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

1. (C) Fiji President Iloilo swore in Commodore Bainimarama and interim Prime Minister on Dec. 5. Bainimarama, still clearly in charge, then urged Fiji citizens and the international community to help bring good government and true democratic values. Iloilo's doctor reports the President is senile. More details are emerging of military abuse, and the police have confirmed to us that a man died in military custody this morning. Chief Justice Fatiaki believes Justice Shameem is a "traitor." Sources suggest the mood in Fijian villages is potentially volatile, but chiefs damp down such sentiments fearing any protests would erupt into violence with worse effects than the coup. China, alleging long-time Taiwan cash payments to the Fiji PM's office, has received reassurance of Fiji's "one China" policy. Bainimarama appears publicly confident he can count of China for military aid if needed. End summary.

Bainimarama interim PM; maiden speech

2. (U) President Iloilo, having been reinstalled yesterday by RFMF Commander Bainimarama, today swore in Bainimarama as interim Prime Minister. A short while later, Bainimarama gave an address to the nation. He promised to uphold the mandates which Iloilo had announced yesterday (ref) and said he will discuss those mandates with an interim government to be sworn in soon. Bainimarama said he will remain RFMF Commander. He appealed to all citizens to help achieve Fiji's true potential through a "transparent, fair, just, and non-corrupt government" that can take Fiji to "truly democratic and Constitution-based elections." He asked the international community to "support our need to find a Fiji-based solution...maintaining true democratic values and ensuring just and good government."

"Senile" President

3. (C) We spoke with President Iloilo's personal physician on 1/4 and inquired what might have caused the turn-around from Iloilo's "rule of law" statement in early December to his now fulsome endorsement of the coup. The MD said Iloilo is at this point so "senile" that he will read out whatever is put in front of him. In early December, VP Madraiwiwi was in place to provide wisdom; now Iloilo hears advice only from

Bainimarama.

Abuse allegations; a murder in custody?

14. (C) Good second-hand sources report that at least one of the female human-rights activists abused at the military camp early Christmas morning was "felt up" by LtCol. Tevita Mara and was warned she would receive worse treatment unless she stopped her activities. In a separate incident, the CEO of the Fijian Affairs Board was reportedly forced to run around the camp dressed only in bra and panties. The police confirmed to us that a man in his late thirties died in military custody this morning. According to the police, soldiers from the checkpoint in Nausori brought the man to the military barracks. Military officials later brought his body - marked by visible bruises - to the police. Pacnews says this is "the first casualty of the military takeover." Good sources tell us the man was not a democracy activist, and that he had complained to the military about a land dispute. The police also told us that on Tuesday a local bus driver complained to soldiers at the Nausori checkpoint that nearby villagers had damaged his bus. The soldiers collected six persons from the village, including a police tactical response unit officer, and subjected them to beatings over a three hour period.

State of Emergency Remains

15. (C) The military spokesman reaffirmed today that Fiji remains in a "state of emergency." He said checkpoints would therefore remain in place around the country.

The CJ's "vacation"

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16. (C) Chief Justice Fatiaki tells us he learned he was about to be placed on "vacation" on Jan. 3, just before Bainimarama's announcement (see Suva 002), when RFMF Chief of Staff Teleni and RFMF lawyer Aziz visited him with two letters: one placing him on vacation; the other terminating his employment. Fatiaki chose the vacation. Fatiaki and his wife left no doubt whom they blame: the "traitor" Justice Nazhat Shameem, who, according to fast spreading rumor, has been advising RFMF coup-related efforts.

The mood in Fiji villages

17. (C) We spoke with VP Madraiwiwi, Ratu Jioji Maulani, a high-ranking chief from Ra Province, and Fatiaki about the mood in the ethnic-Fijian community. None felt confident about predicting the future. Maulani had just spent Christmas week in his home village. He reported that people are continuing with their lives, but underneath there is deep unhappiness. The chief said whenever anyone starts talking about taking to the streets, senior chiefs put a damper on it, knowing that once started, any uprising, even if intended to be peaceful, would spin out of control, endangering Fiji even more than the coup has.

China-Taiwan and the Fiji coup

18. (C) We spoke with China's ambassador to Fiji when he signed the condolence book for President Ford. Amb. Cai acknowledged that China approached Fiji's MFA, but not Bainimarama directly, after the coup seeking assurance Taiwan would make no inroads (see 06 Suva 581). The move was stimulated by a belief that after Fiji's 1987 and 2000 coups Taiwan had gained advantages, and by remarks by previous interim PM Senilagakali that Fiji would look to China, Taiwan, India, and others if Western powers insist on sanctions. Cai reported that after 1987, Taiwan provided F\$1.25 million (about USD 700,000) annually to the Prime Minister's office. After 2000, Cai said, the amount increased by F\$500,000 (USD 300,000). The PRC believed the funds bought improved quasi-diplomatic status for the Taiwan

office here.

¶9. (U) Earlier this week, Bainimarama publicly expressed the view that the RFMF could count on China to provide military assistance if Australia, New Zealand, the U.S., the UK, and France decline to help. When Australian FM Downer discounted that prospect, Bainimarama reiterated confidence that the Chinese are indeed prepared to assist.

Comment

¶10. (C) We hear that some well-qualified, "clean" people are receiving phone calls from the RFMF advisory group with offers of ministerial jobs. In at least one case, we know the response was "no thanks." All of Fiji awaits the list. By taking the PM-ship, Bainimarama clearly retains control of his "clean up," and he certainly can engineer an "immunity" proclamation. Whether he can achieve more lofty goals remains much in doubt.
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